

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for decontaminating the necks of thermoplastic preforms intended for making into containers by a blow molding or stretch-blow molding procedure, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein, as the preforms are fed one after the other into a container manufacturing unit, the preforms pass first through an upstream chamber into which a decontaminating liquid is sprayed continuously so as to maintain in this chamber a fog atmosphere of said decontaminating product with which the necks of the preforms are brought into contact, and then pass in front of ultraviolet lamps arranged so as to completely irradiate the necks of the preforms wetted by the decontaminating product for at least a minimum predetermined period of time, before reaching a device that loads them into the manufacturing unit.

2. (Currently Amended) The method as claimed in claim 1, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the fog is kept flowing through so as to facilitate its renewal.

3. (Currently Amended) The method as claimed in claim 1 ~~or 2, characterized in that~~ wherein the decontaminating product is hydrogen peroxide H₂O₂.

4. (Currently Amended) An installation for the decontamination while they are moving of the necks [(4a)] of preforms [(4)] delivered one after the other to a loading device [(6)], said preforms [(4)] being made of thermoplastic and being intended for making into containers by blow molding or stretch-blow molding, said decontamination installation being structurally and functionally connected to a preform feeder installation [(A)] comprising means for moving the preforms [(4)] one after the other, said decontamination installation comprising ultraviolet lamps [(7)] arranged so that the ultraviolet radiation completely irradiates the necks [(4a)] of the moving preforms [(4)],

~~characterized in that~~ wherein the decontamination installation also includes, upstream of the ultraviolet lamps [(7)], a chamber [(10)] traversed by said preform movement means of the feeder installation [(A)] and in which means [(14)] are provided for spraying a decontaminating product in such a way as to maintain a fog of the decontaminating product inside said chamber.

5. (Currently Amended) The installation as claimed in claim 4, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the spray means [(14)] comprise at least two spray nozzles [(15)] arranged one on either side of the preform movement means and above these, with their respective axes [(19)] aimed roughly in the direction of the necks [(4a)] of the moving preforms [(4)].

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6. (Currently Amended) The installation as claimed in claim 4 ~~or 5, characterized in that~~ wherein suction means $[(20)]$ are connected to the chamber $[(10)]$ in order to create a flow through the latter such as to prevent local accumulations of product in suspension.

7. (Currently Amended) The installation as claimed in ~~any one of claims 4 to 6~~ claim 4, characterized in that wherein inside the chamber $[(10)]$, the preform movement means are surmounted, above the necks $[(4a)]$ of the preforms, by a rod $[(23)]$ of relatively small transverse dimension relative to the diameter of the necks, this rod forming a member that prevents the preforms being lifted up but allows access by the fog of decontaminating product to the inside wall of the necks of the preforms.

8. (Currently Amended) The installation as claimed in ~~any one of claims 4 to 7~~ claim 4, characterized in that wherein the preform movement means comprise an inclined slideway $[(5)]$ down which the preforms $[(4)]$ slide by gravity one after the other and in that this slideway $[(5)]$ passes through the chamber $[(10)]$.